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The CIA's Quest for a Mind Control Drug and Wendell Johnson's Monster Study: A
Comparison of Unethical Experiments

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(Answering Question 2)

In *The Search for The Manchurian Candidate: The CIA and Mind Control*, John Marks presents a thrilling and gripping story about intelligence agents' attempts to use drugs, hypnosis, electroshock therapy, and brainwashing, amongst other techniques, to try to control other human beings. The disturbing thing about this book is that it is not a novel, but an entirely factual account of experiments carried out by the Office of Secret Services (OSS) and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA).

The majority of these experiments were unethical, and many violated just about every part of the Nuremburg Code. In their search for a drug that would make people share their secrets, the CIA gave subjects marijuana, LSD, and a variety of other drugs without their knowledge, completely disregarding the idea of informed consent. Perhaps the best example of this is the testing Sid Gottlieb did on the scientists who worked at the Army Chemical Corps' Special Operations Division in November 1953. These men, who studied toxic substances that could potentially be used for assassination and other purposes, thought they were going on a weekend work retreat. Instead, they were given LSD in their drinks without their knowledge, so the CIA could observe the effects of the drug. One man, Frank Olsen, became depressed and psychotic, and ended up killing himself within a week or so. The CIA admitted, although secretly, that LSD had "triggered" Olsen's death. Olsen was doing classified research for the government, but he certainly never consented, explicitly or implicitly, to be a guinea pig in the testing of a mind control drug.

After the Olsen disaster the CIA and the people involved in the MKULTRA operation, still led by Sid Gottlieb, needed to find new test subjects, so they "chose 'the borderline underworld'- prostitutes, drug addicts, and other small-timers who would be

powerless to seek any sort of revenge if they ever found out what the CIA had done to them” (Marks 96). The CIA set up “safehouses”, brought the subjects there, gave them drugs (amongst them LSD and marijuana), and observed what happened to the subjects. In addition to drugs, the CIA agents tested a variety of intelligence techniques, including recording devices and two-way mirrors. All of this was done, once again, on unwitting subjects who had not in any way given consent, much less informed consent. In addition, the CIA operatives had little concern for the health of the subjects, they were simply interested in learning about response to the drug and how effective it was at getting people to share secrets.

At the time of the experiments, the subjects’ health did not cause undue concern. At the safehouse, where most of the testing took place, doctors were seldom present...In addition to LSD, which they knew could cause serious, if not fatal problems, TSS officials gave White even more exotic experimental drugs to test, drugs that other agency contractors may or may not have already used on human subjects (Marks 105).

So if these experiments were so unethical, why were they able to be conducted without a public outcry? Unlike at a university or academic setting, the CIA’s business is secrecy, lying, and hiding. Therefore, when things did get out of control (for example, in the case of Frank Olsen) they were able to keep them covered up. After Olsen’s death, the CIA was scrupulous about making sure no one found out what had happened. “Agency officials tried to make sure that no outsider would tie Olsen’s death either to the CIA or to LSD” (Marks 89).

In addition, the CIA can use the designation “Classified” to prevent people outside of a select group from knowing about experiments. Whereas someone doing research sponsored by their university is required to present their work at meetings, and subject their experiments to peer review and criticism, someone doing classified research

is free from the standards of their colleagues. Describing the involvement of academic professionals in the kind of unethical research that has been sponsored by the CIA, Marks noted

Any professional doing the kind of things the agency came to sponsor—holding subjects prisoner, shooting them full of unwanted drugs—probably would have been arrested for kidnapping or aggravated assault. Certainly such a researcher would have been disgraced among his peers. Yet, by performing the same experiment under the CIA's banner, he had no worry from the law. His colleagues could not censure him because they had no idea what he was doing (Marks 35).

The CIA decided it would be best if their involvement with the universities and their experiments with LSD were kept secret, to avoid anger on the part of the American public and interest in LSD on the part of the Russians. To accomplish this they passed funding for their research through intermediary foundations. "They did not want to spur the Russians into starting their own LSD program or into devising counter-measures. The CIA's secrecy was also clearly aimed at the folks back home....Moreover, the CIA Inspector General declared that disclosure of certain MKULTRA activities could result in a 'severe adverse reaction' among the American public" (Marks 64).

The CIA furthered this by moving many of the experiments out of the United States, since there are specific restrictions on their actions within the United States. This is perhaps one reason why they made such extensive use of Dr. Ewen Cameron, a Montreal doctor who subjected his patients to a "deprogramming" regime, which combined electroshock therapy with drug cocktails and controlled sleeping patterns. Even after patients became confused or lost their memory, Cameron continued experimenting on them, interpreting this as a sign that his deprogramming was working. He also pressed patients to go on with the experiment, including combinations of his psychic conditioning and LSD treatments, when they told him they wanted to stop. It is widely accepted that

Cameron's psychic conditioning is complete pseudoscience. "Cameron wrote that psychic driving provided a way to make 'direct, controlled changes in personality', without having to resolve the subject's conflicts or make her relieve her past experiences. As far as is known, no present-day psychologist or psychiatrist accepts his view" (Marks 146). In addition to being scientifically unsound, Cameron's experiments were clearly unethical, yet he was widely regarded as a psychiatrist and was even president of the American Psychiatric Association for a time.

A common thread throughout many of these CIA experiments is that they took advantage of people who were unable to fight back. The CIA experiments made use of prostitutes and other people that they had deemed not valuable.

The men from ARTICHOKE found their most convenient source among the flotsam and jetsam of the international spy trade: 'individuals of dubious loyalty, suspected agents or plants, subjects having known reasons for deception, etc'...It is fair to say that the CIA operators tended to put less value on the lives of these subjects than they did on those of American college students (Marks 34).

Likewise the Tuskegee experiment used those who were least able to defend themselves, and thus the researchers were able to get away with treating the subjects very unjustly. This included lying to them and telling them they were being treated and then preventing them from getting free treatment, even once Penicillin, a cheap and effective way of treating syphilis, became available. They deliberately chose an area of Alabama where the population was poor and uneducated, and was not in any position to question the researchers, or create an uproar even if they found out they were being lied to. The fact that the subjects were black, and the racism that was unfortunately prevalent in this country at that time, also contributed to the fact that the experiment was not widely

condemned. “The experiment was widely reported for 40 years without evoking any significant protest within the medical community” (Brandt 29).

These experiments and their exploitation of defenseless people remind me of an experiment that happened in my home state of Iowa in the late 1930s, that recently made headlines in the Des Moines Register. Dr. Wendell Johnson, who was a well-known speech pathologist at the University of Iowa, and has a research center there named after him, conducted experiments to test his “diagnosogenic theory” of stuttering. The basic idea of the theory is that

All children have trouble with their speech when they are young, often repeating words and syllables. By drawing attention to their speech, he reasoned, overzealous parents would make their children so self-conscious and nervous that the children would repeat more words. In time, the children would become so sensitized to their speech that they would not be able to talk without stuttering (Dyer).

Johnson decided to experiment on the children in the Iowa Soldiers’ Orphans Home. His graduate student, Mary Tudor Jacobs, was the one who actually met with the children and conducted the experiments. She identified 10 stutterers and 12 normal speakers, and divided each group equally into an experimental group and a control group. The children in the control group, both stutterers and non, received positive speech therapy, while the children in the experimental group, even the normal speakers, were interrupted, corrected, and made to feel self-conscious about their speech. Even after Johnson and Tudor’s involvement was over, the teachers in the orphanage continued what they believed were lessons that helped improve the children’s speech.

This experiment was clearly an unethical exploitation of powerless people. Not only did the children not give consent, but they had no parents to give consent and their teachers were also kept in the dark about the real nature of the study. This is one of the

reasons why Johnson was able to carry out such an experiment on children. Dyer describes why Johnson was so eager to use the orphanage children. “Moreover, Johnson didn’t need parental permission – something that probably would have been denied. ‘I think it’s not coincidental that he chose to do it with a group of parentless kids’, said Trishia Zebrowski, 45, an assistant professor at the Wendell Johnson Speech and Hearing Center in Iowa... ‘This was the only way he was going to get the kids’” (Dyer).

Johnson never even published the results of the study, so it provided no benefits, and in fact harmed society by the damage it did to the orphans. This violates another part of the Nuremberg Code. After World War II, Johnson’s colleagues warned him that publishing his theory might draw unfavorable comparisons to the Nazi doctors and ruin his reputation. Johnson did eventually publish his “diagnosogenic theory” of stuttering, though without any of the direct evidence he had obtained in what later came to be called “The Monster Experiment”, even though this evidence overwhelmingly supported his ideas. Even without any direct evidence, his theory was widely recognized as the leading one until the 1970s, and although no longer dominant, is still used. The fact that Johnson was able to gain all this recognition and acclaim without ever publishing the results of his study indicates that it was not absolutely necessary, and that it did little or nothing to help society. While it could be argued convincingly that Johnson’s theory and ideas have helped in the treatment of many other people with stuttering problems, it’s impossible to claim that the experiment that he did on the children in the orphanage has benefited people in anyway, and it has certainly proved very damaging to the victims.

Another part of the Nuremberg Code states “The experiment should be conducted so as to avoid all unnecessary physical and mental suffering and injury” (Nuremberg

Code 182). Johnson's experiment caused a great deal of mental suffering for its subjects, including people who otherwise would have had a much better life. Many of the normal speakers in the experiment were made into stutterers, and suffered for the rest of their lives as a result. Their stuttering made any hope of being adopted or finding a happy home impossible. Many started ran away from the orphanage or dropped out of school because of the humiliation and bullying they had to endure from their peers. One subject, Mary Korlaske Nixon, who was in the "normal" group before the experiment, suffered for the rest of her life. Tudor, like the other subjects, did not know she had been part of an experiment, and that her stuttering had been deliberately worsened. After finding out from the reporter who was investigating the story, she wrote in a letter to Mary Tudor "Why experiment on orphans, we have all ready had enough problems and was unwanted. I have nothing left. You stolen my life away from me" (Dyer).

In conclusion, it is clear that the experiments discussed here, including the CIA mind control experiments, the Johnson stuttering experiment, and the Tuskegee syphilis experiment, were all unethical. Each experiment violated some or most of the Nuremberg Code. Subjects were regularly experimented on without giving informed consent, by researchers who took little or no regard for their physical or mental health. These studies were often not necessary and sometimes gave no benefit to society. Yet they were able to continue, because they took advantage of the people in our society who least have a voice: prostitutes and other "lowlifes", poor, uneducated minorities, and orphaned children. These are the people who most need an advocate, and instead they were exploited and used for experiments by researchers.

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